

1469

THE

CHURCH OF THE FUTURE:

AN ESSAY,

CONTAINING

A TERRIBLE ARRAIGNMENT

OF THE

CIVILIZATION AND CHRISTIANIZATION

OF THE

PRESENT AGE,

FROM WHICH AND FROM OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IS ARGUED

THE NEED OF

A NEW ERA,

WHICH IS ANNOUNCED AS CERTAIN AND BELIEVED TO BE

IMMINENT.

PUBLISHED BY THE C. M. MISSION SOCIETY,
817 NORTH FORTY-FIFTH STREET,
PHILADELPHIA.

1889.

CURRENT OPINIONS.

In a speech delivered in New York City at the annual meeting of the National W. C. T. U. of 1888, Miss Frances L. Willard, referring to the action of the late Methodist Conference in New York, which refused to admit women delegates, is reported to have used the following language, which is given somewhat condensed :

"What shall be done about it? is everywhere the question. Many letters and consultations with men and women high in church circles develop a plan somewhat like this : an organization to be formed called the Church Union, made up of those who are unwilling longer to leave inoperative the protest of their souls against a government of the church by its minority ; this Church Union to be open to any and all who will subscribe to the Apostles' Creed and the triple pledge of total abstinence, anti-tobacco and social purity ; none of the members obliged to leave a church to which they now belong in order to join this ; men and women to be on terms of perfect equality, and women to be regularly licensed and ordained. But for myself I love my mother church so well, and recognize so thoroughly that the base and body of the great pyramid she forms is broader than the apex that I would fain give her a little time in which to deal justly with the great host of her loving, loyal and devoted daughters. I would wait four years longer in profound hope and prayer. I say this frankly from my present outlook, *though so often urged, and not a little tempted, and sometimes quite determined to take a new departure.*

"The time will come, however, and not many years from now when, if representation is still denied us, it will be our solemn duty to raise once more the cry 'Here I stand ; I can do no other.' "

In his article on "The New Reformation," in the Nov., '88, *Century Magazine*, Rev. Lyman Abbott says, summarizing the teachings of John Calvin : "There is, he says, no King but one ; no father but one. He alone is the universal King, the All-Father. Kings and hierarchies do but play at law-making ; He is the only law-giver. . . . From Him all authority comes ; in Him all authority centres ; to Him all allegiance is due ; His will is the final, ultimate, absolute fact in the Universe. . . . This is Calvinism—the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty ; to be read in the light of the age against whose dormant anarchy, awakening later in the French Revolution, it was a solemn protest. Nor can we say even now in the United States of America, with its shallow doctrine of popular sovereignty, its cry of *vox populi, vox dei*, its egotism of democracy, its dead sea fruit of Anarchic Socialism that there is no need to listen to and heed this protest of a solemn voice reaffirming the sublime doctrine of the ancient Hebrew prophets and itself reaffirmed by the the least religiously-minded of modern historians.—*J. A. Froude.*"

The Period for Church

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.

FOUR GRAND EPOCHS.

The grand periods of church organization and development have occurred within an interval of seventeen to nineteen hundred years. Following the Septuagint chronology we have the following dates which stand at the commencement of eras :

In the time of the birth of Enos we read that "then men began to call on the name of the Lord." This was in the year of the world 435.

From this date to the preaching of Noah to the antediluvian world was 1900 years.

From the preaching of Noah to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, 1700 years.

From the giving of the law to the crucifixion of Christ, 1834 years.

From the crucifixion of Christ to the present time, 1855 years.

From this statement it appears that throughout the period of human history a radical and far-reaching change in church development has taken place in periods of 1700 to 1900 years.

The Mosaic dispensation commenced 1834 years before the crucifixion of Christ. As a consequence we stand further from Christ than Christ stood from Moses. Four thousand years of human history preceded the Mosaic dispensation, and only three thousand seven hundred and fifty-five years have succeeded it. If Moses was the schoolmaster to bring the world to Christ, the infant church was nearly four thousand years old before it reached the age suitable for such instruction ; and on this basis of development the church of all ages cannot be said to have reached middle life, and is just old enough to enter upon the activities of mature and vigorous manhood.

A NEW ERA.

If we may infer anything from the periodicity mentioned, it is time for another great religious revolution—not a revival or

proportion of all the active Christian faith and zeal of the world, and that is saying a great deal; for, probably, with all our faults and short-comings, there never was an era of greater enlightenment, or an era when there were so many ruled by the spirit of the gospel of Christ.

Protestantism has had 400 years of development, and has an honorable record. The great Lutheran, Presbyterian, and reformed bodies generally, have done noble service for Christ and humanity. And the later Methodist body has a single century's record perhaps unequaled by any branch of the church during so short a time. These communions have planted and nourished missions, and have given a small portion of the wealth which God has conferred upon them for Christian use at home and abroad. They have released the Scriptures from long ages of bondage, translated them into all languages, and given them wings to fly abroad throughout the earth bearing the everlasting gospel. They have done their share in releasing the human mind from bondage, and have made education honorable and intelligence respectable. They have founded States, and the greatest nation in the world; and have impressed upon modern civilization many of the divine precepts, increasing a spirit of humanity, tolerance, peace and good will to men.

These churches have given more light, more law, more liberty than the world had ever before known. Volumes have been written, and other volumes shall yet be written in proof of the greatness and importance of the Protestant form of faith, and we praise God for its glorious record.

And yet Protestantism has its errors and weaknesses, as will, I think, appear, as we consider the present condition of Christianity in Protestant countries. Protestant communities, one and all, deny too largely their responsibility to human society and government. As a result we have had a Christian people with most unchristian governments; and the world has felt the force of our civilization much more than the force of our Christianity.

~~CHURCH UNION.~~

The Lord Jesus prayed for his disciples "That they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee; that they also may

be in us ; that the world may believe that thou didst send me." The broken unity of Christendom dates back to the early Christian centuries, and every century since has increased rather than lessened the divisions.

The differences that separate those who hold professedly the same head are in some cases fundamental, and in all cases sufficient to keep their adherents in separate organizations. If anyone is vain enough to imagine that these differences can be so far removed as to bring Christians together, they are confronted by the fact that no progress has been made in this direction throughout the ages. But this is not the strongest reason for regarding such union impossible. It is impossible because truth and purity are both essential to union, and neither the unifying truth nor the freedom from prejudice can be found. Every Christian sect has doubtless a share of the great vitalizing elements of the faith. Without this they could not exist ; but they cannot step over the barriers that separate them from one another. No great divided bodies of people have ever been brought together or ever can be brought together by merely deciding to leap over the mountains that separate them or bridge their swollen streams. We might as well expect the nations of Europe to come together and form one nation, throwing aside the past and forgetting the feuds of ages. They will not do it ; they cannot do it. But they can come to America, and here, on this broad and free continent, they forget their past and labor for a new civilization.

So it is in the case of the separated churches. A new standard of faith, presenting broader views of truth and duty, a freer realm, a more glorious heritage once offered to the souls of men, and they come together from every sect and every creed and labor in harmony to build up the one and only kingdom of the ever blessed holy One. If I am told that such a realm does not exist, that there is no sphere of truth or duty not spanned by the churches that are, I answer, such a country exists and God made it. The smiles of his countenance light it ; the sun of his righteousness warms it and makes it fruitful ; and there most undoubtedly will gather his chosen ones, realizing that church unity heretofore sought in vain.

2. The corruptions and abuses which prevail, and which the

church as now constituted is powerless to restrain, much less to eradicate.

Here we need some standard of excellence, and what standard can a Christian take except that set up by Christ and his Apostles? Certainly any lower standard is unchristian and unworthy of us. We have a right to ask for and expect the "fruits of the spirit," and a disavowal of the "works of the flesh." We have a right to insist that, if the church cannot *control* all abuses she shall *OPPOSE* all, and *sanction* none ; that she shall separate herself from workers of iniquity.

As the field is vast I shall confine myself to American social and civil life, leaving for others the task of treating other Protestant Christian countries. And here I can only draw a few sketches, for I attempt a work requiring volumes for its complete treatment instead of the fraction of a brief discourse. Allow me to illustrate the subject as it has appeared in the light of our great social epochs, which have brought to the surface vices and virtues in a strong light.

When, a generation ago, the churches of the South accepted slavery as just and right, sought to defend it by Scripture teaching and incorporate it as a prominent factor in their form of civilization ; when they tolerated, not only its existence, but its abuses ; separated from the communion of sister churches rather than listen to their Christian admonitions ; and concluded their folly and wickedness by joining in an open revolt against the best and freest government the world has ever seen, it became manifest that the salt in that church "had lost its savor." And when, in the desperate struggle that followed, we see barbarities scarcely equalled in modern times, we see evidences of a condition of barbarism that the church was unable to control or unwilling to grapple with. And the church of the North shares the guilt and the disgrace. If she had done her duty, and had done it in the right spirit, she could have saved the church of the South ; or, failing in that, could have exonerated herself. But as it was, her selfish, dilatory, time-serving spirit, and her selfish policy, was just as conspicuous as the weakness of the Southern brethren. I have sometimes thought that the church of the North was more to blame, having less to blind it, and being controlled by the pure love of

mammon, without those social prejudices which gave some shadow of excuse to Southern churches. It is at least certain now that both were to blame. They were either unable or unwilling to cope with the evil. Sin brought forth death, and we were fearfully, but justly, punished for our sins.

THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

But I will go back four hundred years for an illustration of a different character. The corrupt Roman hierarchy had become enslaved by mammon, and the lust for gain, and was intent upon raising revenue, no matter at what sacrifice. Tetzels was authorized to sell indulgences to "commit all manner of crimes for a stipulated sum of money." The still uncorrupted heart of the German people uttered an effective protest, and Luther gave voice to the general indignation against a rotten hierarchy. We respond to this, and say "Well done." We stand amazed at the corruption of the Roman church and its willingness to foster crime for reward, and "frame iniquity by a law." And yet in this year of grace, four hundred years later in the history of the church and the world, the people of America and England deliberately consent to debauch their sons and their daughters by licensing the sale of alcoholic liquors, in full knowledge of the fact that in so doing we are licensing all crimes, and opening the way for all abuses; knowing that in doing so we cripple the church and the school, and blast our civilization; entirely cognizant of the fact that in this we take the devil's side against the Lord, crucify Christ afresh and put him to an open shame. A thousand Tetzels with indulgences for sin were a vastly less evil than two hundred thousand venders of alcoholic poisons.

And what has the church done? It has feebly remonstrated. It has cautiously intimated that the traffic was not a proper one for church members to take part in. It has mildly admitted that it was not in accordance with the spirit of the gospel, and that if left wholly uncontrolled it might be dangerous to the community. It has sought to mitigate the evil; not to eradicate it. To mollify the curse; not to end it. On some rare occasions it has, indeed, assumed a stronger tone; and has actually, in words, appeared to speak for truth and righteousness. But when we looked for the

result in action we have always been disappointed. We look in vain for the righteous indignation which should smite such a sin as with a blast of the breath of the Almighty. Up to the present writing a large majority of the professed Christians of America give their influence directly to the perpetuation of the evil. They sit in council with rumsellers; nominate them to their highest civil offices, and elect them when nominated. They even submit to their dictation as though they were born to be lords over God's heritage, instead of being regarded as the impersonations of the kingdom of darkness—which they really are. And while not willing to guarantee to the rumseller a place in the kingdom of heaven, they do not scruple to make him the custodian of their church funds and the director of the church in temporal matters. To my mind this shows a degree of practical wickedness in the church never exceeded in any age. If the Roman church has any stains of deeper hue I do not know where to find them. If she was ever more completely under the power of evil it would be interesting to have the time and place specified. The church of Rome has at least taught that it was its duty to control abuses. We have weakly and wickedly denied our obligations in civil affairs; while, as Christians, we are the dupes of demagogues, and the willing tools of designing and wicked men. If this is progress towards the perfection of the church, surely it can only be true in the sense that the darkest hour is just before the day.

It would be easy to extend such illustrations of our mammon worship, which alone could make such things possible. But I must hasten to mention some other points; for we have merely grazed the surface of our national sins, which cannot be separated from the sins of the church; for the church is responsible, whether she chooses to consider herself so or not, for the civilization which is the product of her activity, or want of activity.

THE SOCIAL EVIL.

There are other things which detract from the purity of the church. There are "wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" on what should be the fair and pure body of the bride, which make her quite unfit for the marriage of the great day. Concentrated in some of our Western Territories, in Utah and neighbor-

ing sections, are plague spots, which merely typify or illustrate the social vices prevailing throughout Christendom. They could not exist there but for the corrupt condition of society which makes even their enormities seem excusable. I leave this part of the subject for abler pens. Those who care for information will not have far to seek it. I only bring it into the evidence. But this social vice is an issue that must, at no very distant day, be met by the church; and this demon will die hard, harder than the demon of alcohol; and what ruin it may work before being exorcised who can tell? Against this vice the church is just as powerless as against the liquor traffic, and more silent. She upholds all the evils of rum by licensing the sale; so she upholds the evils of the social vice by maintaining those institutions which are consecrated to her unholy rituals, as nearly all our places of public amusement are: theatres, operas and public balls. Such places exist as much for ministering to such unholy rites as the worship of Baal and Ashteroth among the heathen nations existed to this end. And, as the liquor traffic is the hot-bed of drunkenness and the crimes that follow from it, so our theatres, operas and dance halls are the hot-beds of social vices; the hatching place of social crimes.

None of the great social abuses could exist except with the consent of the church. She is able, if she cared to do it, to put them away. She does not care to do it and they remain. A church that does not desire the social and moral purity that the gospel enjoins is not a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A church that limits itself to the effecting of an insurance policy on the life to come is a church whose policy of life insurance is not worth purchasing.

A recent writer, treating of the subject of Christian morality and the duty of the church to society, says: "Our future treatment of moral questions must be social rather than individual. This last conclusion brings us face to face with one of the most marked and injurious characteristics of the present time. The Christian church in all its branches feels the currents of the new national life slowly and imperfectly. Their declension has been so marked that it has been recently charged against them by an able editor, who wrote in sorrow rather than anger, that he was unable to recall a single instance where conversion or joining the

church has been followed by a vigorous, healthy, earnest, Christ-like denunciation of the evils which lie at the base of society, or of a continued and persistent effort to overthrow or even to understand the causes which are sending thousands to untimely graves, filling jails and asylums and state prisons with broken and dishonored images of Christ, and much less slowly than surely undermining the temple of liberty and justice the world over."

And this is Protestant Christianity, the cream of Christian life. We have before looked throughout Christendom in vain to find much of excellence outside of Protestant Christianity, and we find a very poor showing here. What else has Christianity to show us? Nothing. Allow, if you please, that we have emphasized the evil, and that some good remains that we have not discovered. While this is doubtless true, we have conceded much of excellence to our churches historically and have said that they hold in their communions nearly all the moral force of the nation. But all this good is hopelessly handicapped with evil. There needs and must come a separation before the church will be ready for any aggressive work against sin.

THE WORSHIP OF MAMMON.

What is the cause of all this sin and consent to sin on the part of the church, where we should expect to find purity? I have striven long and earnestly to solve this problem, and have given many years of profoundest inquiry to the subject; and I am thoroughly persuaded that the one corrupting influence which neutralizes all the virtues of the church, and betrays it everywhere into sin, is the worship of mammon. It is for mammon's sake that every abuse is tolerated, and the vilest men exalted to high places. It is for the sake of worldly pride and worldly influence that corrupt men are welcomed into the church; or, where their vices are too odious to make this possible, that such men are made "the custodians of the temporal interests" of the church. It is the worship of mammon that thrusts the pious poor man aside that the voluptuous may take all the places of honor. It is the worship of mammon that gives vice encouragement and degrades virtue; that leads a professedly Christian people to debauch their sons and daughters by licensing the sale of rum, and that pollutes its trea-

sury with the price of blood. It is the worship of mammon that upholds grinding monopolies, and denies that common justice and regard for the common welfare which is the very corner-stone of our free republic.

That the church of the present day is a partner in much of this iniquity some will deny, especially the priest of mammon and his faithful devotees. That they will deny it is a matter of course ; for this god is worshiped by the church not openly, but by stealth, by every man "in the chambers of his imagery," as so graphically described by the prophet Ezekiel in the 8th chapter of his prophecy. And yet, while secret in its worship of mammon, the church is not secret in its union with those outside of the church who openly build altars to this idol. Like the kings of Judah, the church makes alliances with the idolatrous kings of the false Israel, and their priests fraternize and join the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal. The priest of mammon sits without rebuke in the convocations of the godly ; nay, is welcomed there, often the most honored and most welcome guest ; and the special zeal of the times is to so perfect this union that it shall be eternal. In this way the God of love is rapidly being dethroned from the control of the Christian conscience, and the god of power, of lust and rapine is set up in his place.

COMPROMISE WITH SIN.

As a people we have never once in our history touched a moral question in a Christian method. We have never once risen above those paltry and wicked compromises with evil which show our consciousness of the sin, and our unwillingness to abandon it. And what is worse is the fact that our leading men in the church endorse this plan as sagacious and wise, and take pride in their superior shrewdness in thus being able to serve both God and mammon, to retain their rich pulpits and rich but godless communicants, save themselves from the odium of denouncing sin or preaching righteousness ; and thus gain all the worldly advantages of present success, with the secret intention of going over to the other side whenever the self-sacrifice of men who truly fear God shall so far open the way that they can do it without personal sacrifice or with the added advantage of worldly promotion.

This being the policy of the leaders in church and state, it is not at all wonderful that their followers should take the same course, and put self first and God last ; self first and humanity last ; self first and righteousness, truth and holiness last—or not at all.

In this way every evil has been augmented by moral cowardice. God has spoken once, yea twice, in the history of this nation ; and the hardened consciences of these men defy him just as of old. A million of lives and seven thousand millions of dollars were sacrificed to this spirit of selfishness in the slave-holders' rebellion ; which, but for the concurrent wickedness of the North as well as the South, would have been impossible. And now, rather than do righteousness, a wicked church is willing to incur the divine displeasure and run the risk of vastly greater sacrifice of blood and treasure. I do not see how it will come, but that it will come I have no doubt. I know of nothing in human history that so fittingly illustrates our position and our peril as the history of the kings of Israel and of Judah during those terrible years of decline that followed the reign of Solomon and ended with the carrying away into Babylon. If national disasters of equal magnitude do not reach us it will not be because we are less guilty, but because God, in his infinite mercy, has found some means of escape for a guilty people. The rum traffic is our Baal, and lust is our Ashteroth ; and our worship of those is no less conspicuous and marked than was the worship of those divinities in ancient Israel and Judah. We should not deceive ourselves with the idea that we are innocent because only a small minority worship these bestial divinities, while a respectable majority protest. The protesting majority is too small, and its protestations too feeble to arrest the divine displeasure. Israel and Judah reformed and compromised generation after generation, and sunk continually lower until they were destroyed. Whether we shall reach the same end remains to be seen, but there is a striking resemblance to their course in everything we do. Like them we are always reforming and every generation sinking lower than the preceding generation was in its regard for virtue. What the end will be I will not venture to prophesy. But of one thing we may be sure, and that is that we have reached nothing in the way of

reformation that guarantees at all any hope of prosperity ; and, if such hope has anything to rest on, it is in something vastly beyond anything yet attempted, or in the "uncovenanted mercies of God."

Stop

THE GREAT MISSIONARY FAILURE.

3. The wants of heathen nations, who are cursed by the vices of our civilization more than they are benefited by an emasculated Christianity.

Our missions are but a small part of our influence abroad. It is our commerce that is the great factor in the spread of our civilization. We are judged, not by what our missionaries say, but by what our merchants do. Our religion is judged in the light of our morality and in the degree in which it has molded our nation and people. What reason have we to ask heathen nations to distinguish between our practices and our professions? We judge heathen nations, not by the précepts in their sacred books, but by what we see of their daily life, and the influence of those teachings upon the people. So we are judged, and so we shall be judged, despite any explanations which we may try to make ; and what they see of the American and foreign residents in their commercial ports or in our great cities does not commend it.

We are told that in Constantinople the Mohammedans say when they see a drunkard that he has "left Mahomet and gone to Jesus." With Christian countries all under the curse of rum it is not a very strange inference that drunkenness is a part of our religion ; and there are not wanting those in this country who deliberately take this outrageous position without the excuse which the Mohammedan can offer for failing to make a proper distinction between our theories and our practice.

So, in my judgment, we shall be judged by our morality rather than by any theories of a philosophical nature in the eyes of the heathen world ; and if we fail to control vice at home we may throw to the winds our hope of converting the world to Christ. If sensuality is to rule Christian lands the heathen nations will prefer their own forms of sensuality to ours. Witness further, on this last point, the curse inflicted on Africa by the sale of rum ;

and the depopulation of the islands of the Pacific which have suffered from a contact with our civilization.

4. The despair of present methods of Christian work, and their want of effectiveness in bringing to the front in human society the best elements of Christian life and character, especially in view of the imminence of the final great battle for truth and righteousness.

The result of Christian work in the past is certainly not altogether satisfactory. There does not seem to have been much of the ripened fruit of Christian character or culture. We have not yet reached the realization of the hopes of the Christian fathers. Our ideal of excellence is clearly beyond the results achieved. All the prophecies both of the Old Testament and the New point us to something more perfect in Christian development than we have yet reached.

The church, strong in numbers, is weak in consecration. It stands paralyzed in the presence of evil, charmed by the wily serpent who has so long befooled the human race. The church studies the arts of peace; peace at any price, at any sacrifice, at any neglect of its most sacred duties. It has no use for the weapons which Paul said, in his day, were mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan. It has made no preparation for a warfare with sin, for it has no intention of waging any warfare. It is evident, and will appear evident to any one who will give the subject consideration, that this warfare will be fought not by the churches, but by Christians who have grace enough to come out from them and stand up for truth and righteousness. The church attacks no evil, but yields to all with no resistance or with the merest pretence of resistance. But were she willing to enter into any such warfare she is wholly unprepared for it. The modern church was not organized to represent the church militant. It seems to have been built on a peace basis. Unable to coax men to come to her sacred standard, she has condescended, for the sake of worldly advantage, to go to the world, and to meet it more than half way. Have we not reason to despair of the present methods of Christian work?

The church is not merely unwilling to attempt the work of reform, but it is incompetent. It cannot do any one of a thou-

sand things that are demanded of the church of the future. The new wine must be put into new bottles. Those who imagine that the work to be done can be done by the present churches have a very inadequate idea of the work demanded.

We have had an era of profound peace with evil. I believe there is nothing that the church of the present day fears so much as to disturb Satan. It cares little whether the Lord of life and glory is pleased or displeased ; but it is profoundly solicitous as to how the Devil shall take its action. If he should be displeased and fail to endorse its policy, there would be trouble in the church at once. And this is true of all branches of the church. It is not for Protestants to charge this upon Catholics, or Catholics to charge it upon Protestants, or members of the Greek communion. All are guilty before God. I have never once seen any decided action of the church against the arch enemy of souls. Now there are in all branches of the church good and true men who personally oppose the Devil, and many of them imagine that the church of their choice does the same thing. They will not endorse the above language, for they are not instructed. They know that they, individually, mean to conquer sin ; and, with what they regard as Christian charity, attribute their own virtue to the church to which they belong. They have become accustomed to excuse defects, and to endorse compromises with evil, until their consciences are not offended ; and having no higher ideal, they are satisfied. But there are others who are gradually becoming aware of the real conditions of the problem ; who are asking what the church is doing or trying to do ; who are dissatisfied with hollow truces and perpetual peace with evil ; who believe that the kingdom of heaven is more than meat and drink. There are those who begin to look abroad upon the nations and who have caught some conception of the "solidarity of humanity." They begin at last to see that individual religion will not save society, and that a man is responsible for the systems of iniquity which he upholds. There are those who have some little conception of the relations of religion to society and to human government, to social usages, and to all those questions upon which the happiness and prosperity of the toiling millions rest.

They have, in other words, a higher ideal of excellence than

that which they see realized in government, in social usages, and in the spirit and aims of modern society. They cannot regard the selfish apathy of so-called Christian people as really Christian. They wish to see the spirit of Christ dictate, as it does not now dictate, social and civil life. They know that it would soon banish the horrible evils to which we have become so accustomed as to look upon them with indifference. They see that vice and crime is an outgrowth as much of false aims in society as of weakness in individuals. They see that the poverty and unrest of millions is unnecessary and unchristian. They see heavy burdens bound upon the poor which our ruling classes are unwilling "to touch with one of their fingers." They see a low order of virtue, base and worldly aims, sensuality and ignorance, where a higher order of virtue, Christian aims and intelligent Christian action are called for by the spirit of our religion and all the sacred claims of God upon us.

At the close of nineteen centuries of Christian endeavor we are able to count so many millions of those who are known as CHRISTIANS, or live in lands whose governments acknowledge Christianity. It matters little to our argument how many millions are counted. The only test of value is the character of the civilization of nominally Christian countries and the individual character of the people. We have seen that the civilization represented is shockingly low, when taken at its best. Of its darker phases, as seen in despotic Russia, in Austria, Roumelia and Turkey, it would be impossible to treat intelligently here. Long study and careful research can alone uncover the dark places filled with the habitations of cruelty, which do much towards keeping heathenism in countenance, and which show that Christianity must be something more than a name before the glories of the millennial era can be ushered in. In Germany, Sweden, Norway, England and America, we find more intelligence and, let us hope, more of the spirit of Jesus. And we will find in all Christian countries some real Christians; some whose lives correspond, as nearly as their surroundings render it possible, with the teachings of Christ as they understand those teachings. "Many shall come from the East and from the West and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." But how few! alas, how few!

When we take the most hopeful view of the case, and look with the largest charity and construe the divine law as leniently as we dare construe it, the really true and conscientious whom we may rationally hope will be accepted among the chosen jewels of the Son of God, are found to be few indeed. It would seem that some revival of the ancient faith were indeed a thing to be prayed for, hoped for, longed for.

There are many things at present which remind us of the era which ushered in the Gospel dispensation. The influx of modern spiritism is a most significant event. Whether for good or evil, whether true or false, it has stirred to new conceptions of life millions of people. It has gone down to the atheist and has awakened in him conceptions of a future life before despaired of. Though but a faint glimmering, it has given light upon the path of life to large classes of people who were before neglected, who, for one cause or another, had cut themselves off from church relations, and were drifting without even a star to light them over the dim unknown of an ocean they were compelled to cross.

THE CHURCH BEHIND THE AGE.

It is not the church which is moved, so much as the world of mankind. And so it was in the times of Christ. The great heart of universal humanity beats with new hopes, and the minds of men are plastic, awaiting new revelations, ready to be molded into new forms of excellence, to take on new forms of thought and new modes of action. So we stand to-day for the first time during the Christian ages where Paul and the other Apostles stood; we see the same or greater developments of moral forces. And this new life did not begin yesterday. For several generations it has been agitating the nations. As a Christian poet has well sung,

" 'Tis an age on ages telling,
To be living is sublime."

A state of expectancy has been created which must come to some grand result or leave a sense of disappointment that would of itself paralyze all Christian endeavor. Instead of speaking of an era to come, it would be more accurate to speak of an era

already come, and well advanced towards the perfect day. The sun of this new day is already far above the horizon. But alas ! it is not a morning without clouds. Fogs and darkness hang around it. It reminds one of some mornings in spring, when the hills are tinged with a radiance of glory and the brightest of mornings is dawning. But before the sun has fairly risen, storm-clouds gather in the sky and obscure the brightness. So in the case of this new day. The gathering storms have, for a time, obstructed the coming light ; and we are too much interested in the coming storm to note the coming of the day. But even so this promise is significant ; and the threatened storms do not belie the prophecy. What era ever was ushered in without social and civil convulsions ? What new era ever satisfied the scribes of the old dispensation ? They have personally much to lose and little to gain from the overturning that must come. They have never at any time gone forth with banners to meet the coming king. The lights of their own invention please them better than the sun of righteousness that arises with healing in his wings. So we see to-day the church but little moved in the presence of these mighty forces that are raising humanity to a higher level.

In view of these facts many of our best men have come to a settled despair of any success in restoring primitive Christianity, much less of reaching a higher Christian ideal, through any means now at our command.

They despair not merely of the present *methods* of Christian work, but of the *church* as now organized to do any more than it has already done or is now doing ; which, however beautiful in itself, is not the work demanded for the destruction of organized error or the fighting of the battle of the great day.

THE MILLENNIAL ERA.

But a revival of the ancient faith is not enough. We cannot put the oak back into the acorn, or the man of years into the infant's cradle. The millennial era will not be a repetition of the Apostolic age. It will, and must embody new characteristics, as widely separated from the condition of the infant church planted by the apostles as the coming of the Son of man in the clouds with

power and great glory differs from his appearance to the shepherds as the babe of Bethlehem. We have had the flower ; we look for the fruit. Or, if a new blossoming is in the order of the Divine working, it is a blossoming which makes a flower garden of the desert, or the genial breath of a springtime that awakens all nature throughout an entire hemisphere and touches the souls of millions emancipated from the drudgery of sin ; a time in which whole nations shall be born in a day.

Is such an era imminent? Are there any indications that foreshadow it? What means the widespread expectation of the second coming of Christ? What means the general expectation of some coming glory? The rising to higher planes of thought of the millions? The breaking down of the barriers which for ages have held the nations enslaved and have separated them from others? Iron yokes of bondage that from the dawn of human history have never been broken begin to yield to new and powerful influences. We have come to emphasize once more the dignity of human nature. Our own great country is teaching this lesson. The experiment of a free government which has entered into its second century is in itself preaching a gospel which is heard by the enslaved people of other lands. But down deeper than this renewed political life lie the springs of a new social era. We stand once more in the centre of the world as Athens did of old. In our great cities all nations are represented, and we begin to understand again what Paul expressed so eloquently when, standing in the Acropolis in queenly Athens, he said : "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

What will be the effect of the preaching of a new dispensation? A higher conception of excellence will be put forth as the rule and aim in life. War will be proclaimed against evil. The deadly truce with sin will be broken. Thought will be awakened. Long buried truths will leap to the front and be recognized. The awakened Christian conscience will soon learn to detest evils which are now tolerated without question, and an army will be raised to fight the battles of the Lord. The ease-loving will neglect, and the carnal will oppose the movement. The church has never gone forward as a unit in any reform, and we have little reason to believe it ever will. The Jews still reject Christ, eighteen

hundred and fifty years after they crucified him. Romanists still deify the Pope. The Buddhists never exterminated the Brahmins, though for many centuries they have been immensely popular, and now outnumber the Christian population of the entire globe. And so everywhere throughout history. There is a residuum who see some good in the old, and maintain it long after God has raised a higher standard.

So to-day a new standard will divide the church ; and if it failed to divide it, it would do no good. It must *exclude* as well as *include*. Here is where its virtue lies.

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

The reason, the great reason, why we can do little in the church at present, is because it is so much under the power of evil that bad men in the church neutralize, and will continue to neutralize, all the good attempted by the godly. They cover up their designs under specious pretexts. They use honeyed words and deceive good men. But in their hearts they obey Satan and study the interests of his kingdom. Let any reform be proposed, these men come to the front and plead for conservatism. To the full extent of their influence they antagonize any forward movement against evil ; and they have generally influence enough to prevent action, —except in special cases, where, through long and persistent effort, some subject like the temperance question is forced upon an unwilling church, until for shame's sake, it is forced to take sides against the evil. But, even in these exceptional cases, this evil element hinders action and postpones indefinitely any aggressive work. But in regard to the hundreds of other questions, in which there is not the same chance for the aggregation of public sentiment, this conservative element is all-powerful for evil.

The new church, on the contrary, must of necessity be a unit on every moral issue. Like the church founded by John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea, and adopted by Christ, it will be a church raised for moral issues ; a church that believes in practical endeavor, not in sentimentality ; a church into which will flow naturally all the elements of good, and where good men will be welcomed and have a sphere of labor which is denied them in the present condition of Christianity.

The bringing together of this band of faithful men and women will be in itself a mighty power for good, and with it will come the Divine blessing and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What hinders the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayers of God's people? Manifestly the sins for which we are made responsible by our association with bad men. How were it possible for the Holy Ghost to be present in churches compromised with evil?

But we may be told that we should not be too precipitate in this movement; that we should wait for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the enterprise. We may observe here that the Holy Ghost did not come upon John the Baptist, and that a generation later his followers had not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. It was not the power of the Holy Ghost in its outward manifestation that ushered in the Christian era. So we may wait till the Judgment Day before an unrepentant church shall be raised by the power of the Holy Ghost from its present degradation. We must, first, begin to be obedient. We must separate ourselves from sinners in the church. We must break up this fatal truce with Satan. We must obey the injunction of the Apostle, and withdraw ourselves from "every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the commandment given." When we shall have done these things; when we shall have made our repentance known through our works; and when the faithful have been with one accord in one place for many days, as the disciples were on the day of Pentecost, then we may hope for the outpouring of the spirit of power which will lead us forth prepared for the conquest of the world.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW ERA.

But what will be the characteristics of this new era? What will it be as to doctrine, polity, etc.? As to polity, it will be neither Protestant nor Catholic in a divisive sense, but both Protestant and Catholic in the true sense of these words. In its Catholicity it will embrace all true Christians, and it will protest against every form of sin. As to doctrine, the church of the future will be formed on lines of character rather than belief. Still, it will not be liberal in the sense of those denominations that make truth and error synonymous terms. It will have a faith and hold it tenaciously. It will emphasize the claims of truth as well as of righteousness, knowing that only the truth can make us free. It will, however, be a liberal church in the true meaning of that word. We shall come back to the liberality of the Apostle Paul and say with him: "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."

It will have at least two articles of faith:

I. To fear God.

II. To work righteousness.

All that is merely sacramental will vanish. Ordinances will be consecrated to a higher use than that of dividing the household of faith. We shall stand where good men of all ages have stood and adopt the faith of Abraham, Moses and David; the faith of Elijah, of Daniel and of all the prophets, as well as that of Christ and the Apostles.

The Bible will remain ; but the interpretations which have divided men will be forgotten. Mystical inferences and unwarrantable deductions will be set aside. Jesus will remain : but the endless speculations about his person will perish ; and that ancient nation, the Jews, will see in him their long looked for Messiah.

The Christianity of Christ, as he conceived it, is the true and universal religion, never to be superseded or outgrown. It embodies the Word which is, was and ever shall be, the "WORD forever settled in heaven ;" that which is true because it inheres in the character of the Infinite One who changes not. We shall see that religion is true as science is true, because founded on existing entities, not on speculations or suppositions, not on matters of faith beyond knowledge, but on known facts of human life, no more to be questioned than the facts of astronomy or the cosmogony of the earth. Of course, there must always remain something of that mystery which hangs about existence and environs us at every turn ; something of that infinity which must forever be beyond human limitations. There is, and must forever be, a realm of faith which is beyond sight. All I mean to affirm is, that the verities of our holy religion, properly understood, are not less certain than our knowledge of science ; the one being the outward and visible and the other the inward and invisible expression of the divine Being. For, in the church of the future, GOD will be all in all. And, as works of science do not create but reveal what *is*, so religion will be understood and seen to be inherent and necessary ; not an outgrowth of the teachings of the Bible merely, but that this holy Book itself is a mere outline of the Being who is the Life of life, and whose laws encompass us, "in whom we live and move and have our being ;" that the truths of the Bible are true, not because they are written but because they are a transcript of what "was from the beginning with God." We shall see in this the true grounds of infallibility, and transfer our adoration from a book manipulated by man, to Him who is the Author and Source of truth, and who is above all possibility of perversion ; through which we shall be able to answer those who bring even the Bible into the defence of their pet schemes of iniquity.

But when and how will this new era be ushered in? I answer, it will come in God's own time. We may look for it, and, if God wills, do something to promote and hasten it ; but it can come only in God's own time. It will come as the spring comes, breaking the icy bands of winter, releasing ten thousand streams, and awakening to life all nature. It will come as a new world comes into being when the morning stars rejoice together and all the sons of God shout for joy. It will come in the inspiring breath of the Almighty, and the glory of our salvation will be his, all his.